



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Grand Canyon News Release

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Cause of death of National Park Service employee at Grand Canyon National Park still unknown

Grand Canyon, Ariz. – On November 2, 2007, Eric York, a 37-year-old wildlife biologist at Grand Canyon National Park, was found deceased in his residence on the South Rim. The cause of his death is still unknown.

An autopsy was performed by the Coconino County Medical Examiner. Preliminary results show fluid in lungs and signs of pneumonia.

Although rare, hantavirus and plague do occur in the Southwest. Due to the nature of York's profession/hobbies and exposure to wildlife that can transmit these diseases, hantavirus and plague have not been ruled out from preliminary autopsy results. Additional tests are being conducted, and results are expected later this week.

Hantavirus is transmitted to humans through infected rodent droppings, urine and saliva, particularly in indoor, poorly ventilated areas. It is not transmitted from person-to-person. Symptoms of hantavirus include fever, headache, joint pain and difficulty breathing.

Plague is transmitted primarily by rodent fleas and direct contact with infected animals. The pneumonic form can be transmitted from an infected person to a non-infected person via airborne

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cough droplets. Prophylactic antibiotics can prevent infection when given to people who have had close contact with an infected person.

As a precautionary measure, and until these infectious agents can be ruled out, the National Park Service is working with the Grand Canyon Clinic to offer a seven-day course of prophylactic antibiotics to persons who had close contact (within six feet) with York while he was symptomatic. These people have been contacted and are in the process of receiving medication.

People who had close contact with York while he was symptomatic have also been told to watch for symptoms consistent with plague and to seek medical attention as soon as possible if symptoms occur. These symptoms include high fever, chills, a cough and breathing difficulty.

For more information about this incident, please call the Grand Canyon National Park Incident Information Center at (928) 638-7922 or (928) 638-7688. For additional information on hantavirus or plague and for tips on prevention, please visit the Centers for Disease Control web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/index.htm>.

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